

# Curiosities of the Lincoln Cult.

BY A. S. CHAPMAN.

A Little Book-Shop in Springfield Has Come to Be a Sort of Clearing House for All Relics of the "Great Emancipator," and Its Proprietor Has Made a Study of the Peculiarities of Collectors.

*An original article written for THE SCRAP BOOK.*

**A**BRAHAM LINCOLN scattered letters, legal papers, and personal effects over central Illinois with a free hand. Now that interest in the "Great Emancipator" is increasing year by year and every by-path is searched for mementoes and historical material, Springfield has become the capital of the Lincoln cult and the Mecca of Lincoln pilgrims. Aside from the tourist-haunted Lincoln home, which is maintained by the State of Illinois, and the library of the State Historical Society, there is in Springfield a spot of absorbing interest to every student of the martyred President's life.

This is a book-shop wherein is conducted the novel business of brokerage in Lincolniana. Just as the commentaries on the lives of some authors sometimes become of greater literary value than the works of the authors themselves, the light shed on the national reverence of Lincoln by the traffic in his mementoes illuminates the subject from an entirely new point of view. I was in search of some old volumes of Illinois history when I discovered it. My first inquiries were made at a modern book and stationery store, where they told me: "Just go to the little book-shop around the corner."

From the aggressively modern surroundings of vertical filing devices and "best sellers" I passed to a scene of picturesque disorder that would have been dear to the heart of Lincoln himself. The walls are lined with volumes out of print and with portraits of Lin-

coln. Apart from his concern with the question of dollars and cents, the broker has the collector's interest in his calling, and the story of his successes and failures form a chapter in themselves.

## Great Lincoln Library.

The prices fetched by mementoes, and the lengths to which collectors will go in gratifying their tastes, are a revelation to all who have not had an insight into this particular form of enthusiasm. One of the most noted of these collectors is John E. Burton, of Milwaukee, whose taste is for the accumulation of books of Lincoln history. His library in this department comprises more than twenty-five hundred volumes and pamphlets, not including magazine and newspaper articles. He has been known to pay more than two thousand dollars in two months for books which appealed to his fancy.

Major William H. Lambert, of Philadelphia, another collector, whose hobby is manuscripts, but whose valuable collection recently was destroyed by fire, paid a thousand dollars for a letter from Lincoln to General Grant containing a military order. The next lower price for a manuscript, so far as the broker knows, was five hundred dollars for a personal letter, for which somebody, on account of information it contained, was willing to pay this price.

While John Hay was at work on the Nicolay and Hay Life of Lincoln he was a liberal buyer of manuscripts, paying from ten dollars to twenty-five dollars for single documents. As the making of Lincoln literature goes steadily

on, and every writer is keen to discover new material, the demand for manuscripts promises to continue undiminished. From the literary point of view, the passing of manuscripts into the hands of collectors is to be regretted. The collector is jealous of his treasures. In his eyes, they would lose in value if published, and he guards them carefully.

### Valuable Finds in Curious Places.

The signature of Lincoln used in the series which recently ran in the *Century Magazine* was discovered on the fly-leaf of an old dictionary which the broker found among a lot of discarded books in a Springfield attic. It was sold to Major Lambert, the Philadelphia collector.

Another find was the contents of a tin box which once belonged to O. H. Browning, one of the leading lawyers of Illinois in Lincoln's time, the letters and papers selling to collectors for several hundred dollars. The broker once met a woman who, finding that he was a Lincoln enthusiast, told him she had among her papers a muster-roll of Lincoln's company in the Blackhawk Indian War. The broker lay awake nights thinking of the possibilities of profit in that precious document. She had promised to send it to him. As he did not receive it, he wrote to her. He had no answer. He wrote again, this time receiving a reply that her family believed the manuscript should be kept in its possession. Its market value is placed at five hundred dollars.

One day a man entered the broker's shop to show him a book. It was a volume of great historical importance, unknown to its owner. During Lincoln's first campaign for the Presidency, one of his friends wanted to help him in the canvass. In order to have something to convince voters of Lincoln's position on the issues, the friend asked for a written statement from the candidate. Mr. Lincoln took a small leather-covered book with blank leaves, into which he pasted clippings from his published speeches.

These he annotated on the margins of the pages, one of the notes covering an entire blank page. The little book was unquestionably genuine. The broker asked whether the book were for sale,

and finding it was, offered one hundred and fifty dollars. At this offer the owner seemed to take alarm. He backed toward the door, saying he would come again. He never did. A short time after, the broker heard of the sale of the book to a publishing firm for a high price. To this day the broker believes he erred in judgment in offering so large a price that the owner received an inkling of its value. Had he offered only fifty dollars, he might have secured the prize.

### Fed Furnace with Speeches.

Probably the greatest historical loss was the wanton destruction of the bulk of the manuscripts of Lincoln's speeches made during his debates with Douglas. When the President-elect started from Springfield for Washington to be inaugurated he left with a family in the Illinois capital an old-fashioned carpet-bag filled with letters and papers. Among them were his manuscripts of the celebrated debates written on the blue paper in vogue at that time.

The carpetbag was never called for and after the death of Lincoln the family with whom it had been left began to give out the sheets to their friends one by one, till a considerable number got into circulation. The greater part of the manuscript remained in the carpet-bag, which was kicked about an attic for twenty-five years, when some person with a highly developed sense of order threw it into a furnace. Thus, a priceless historical treasure was lost. Since that time the sheets given out by the family have been finding their way singly into the market, selling readily for from fifty to sixty dollars each. Charles F. Gunther, of Chicago, owner of a large and valuable collection, bought most of them through the broker. He once addressed a caustic letter to him saying that the Lincoln-Douglas debates were costing him much more sheet by sheet than if he had bought them as a whole.

Bound volumes of the debates containing Lincoln's signature are for sale occasionally. They sell quickly for fifty or sixty dollars each. The broker once found one of these copies bearing the inscription "Compliments of A. Lincoln" on the fly-leaf. In the back was

pasted a pamphlet copy of James L. Scripps's "Life of Lincoln," written for campaign purposes by the Chicago *Tribune* editor, and probably the first life of Lincoln ever written. To the great grief of the broker, the volume was not for sale, though he hopes to get it at some time in the future.

### Photographs Fetch High Prices.

For a man of Lincoln's modesty, the number of his photographs in existence, probably sixty different sittings, is somewhat remarkable. The number is accounted for by Lincoln's wish to please people who asked for his likeness. One of these originals, all of which are well known, will sell for from fifty to sixty dollars, and a daguerreotype, on account of its greater rarity and artistic value, for one hundred dollars. A few of these daguerreotypes are still in existence.

One of the curious features of Lincoln brokerage is the fact of its being conducted largely on honor. Persons who have relics for sale are willing, as a rule, to send them on approval, the only way, of course, in which they can be bought; while on the other hand the broker goes on the principle that a collector will pay for what he wants, a principle which he has found to work well in practise.

What the broker must guard against is attempts to impose on him with spurious articles, many of which have been submitted to him. One of these came from a young man in a Michigan town, who wrote that he had six original Lincoln letters for sale. He sent them on approval. They purported to be originals of letters which had been published. The broker was well enough versed in Lincoln lore to miss, in reading them, an entire sentence which he knew ought to be in the text. Although the writing was a good imitation of Lincoln's, the omission of the sentence was enough to brand them as forgeries. Their author was a member of a good family, who felt keenly the disgrace of his attempt.

### Lincoln as a Wood-Carver.

An Indiana man once tried to pass off and sell a wooden cup with a relief of Lincoln's face carved on the outside, declaring it to be the handiwork of Lin-

coln himself. Although the representation of the President's features was good, the absurdity of believing that he had turned wood-carver was enough to condemn the piece.

A still more crude attempt was made by a lady of Springfield, who offered for sale an alleged original copy of the New York *Herald* containing the account of Lincoln's assassination, which, she said, had been in her family from the date of his death. When the broker looked at the back of the sheet he found a patent-medicine advertisement dated 1903. It was one of the facsimile copies of the New York *Herald* in common circulation.

Major Lambert now purchases only such articles as bear internal evidence of genuineness, such as a signature. Mr. Gunther will accept documentary evidence, or the testimony of trustworthy people. One of Mr. Gunther's recent purchases was an old-fashioned bookcase. The edges of the shelves had been marked with labels for the classification of books, and the label "History" in Mr. Lincoln's writing remained attached to one of the shelves. This bookcase sold for one hundred dollars.

### A Showman's Weird Venture.

The State of Illinois is an occasional purchaser of manuscripts and photographs for the library of the Historical Society, which has a large and interesting collection. After the death of Lincoln, the old homestead in Springfield was given to the State by his son Robert. It is maintained and kept open as a place of public interest, and is visited annually by thousands of people, many of whom come from considerable distances for this purpose.

Within a few months an attempt was made by an enterprising promoter to turn the car in which Lincoln's body was brought from Washington to Springfield into a money-making venture by exhibiting it throughout the State for a price. It resulted in financial disaster for the man who conceived the idea. On the other hand, a tree known to have been planted by Mr. Lincoln was worked up into small articles which sold readily. Illinois has now been raked thoroughly for mementos of Lincoln.

## ALONZO THE BRAVE.



MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS (1775—1818) was a wealthy Englishman in the diplomatic service, a friend of Byron and Sir Walter Scott, from both of whom he imbibed a taste for the romantic, which in his mind took the form of supernaturalism. Spending some years in Germany, he saturated himself with the legendary lore of that country, and on returning to England wrote a book called "Ambrosio; or, the Monk," which became immensely popular. It was full of mys-

terious and fearful happenings, hinting at murder and spectral visitants, while some passages were so sensual as to cause the sale of the novel to be prohibited in England. From this time Lewis was popularly known as "Monk" Lewis.

He followed up his first romance with a play called "The Castle Specter"—a melodrama inspired by an imagination which loved the ghastly. Lewis was one of the first to recognize the genius of Sir Walter Scott, who contributed some stories included by Lewis in his "Tales of Wonder." The poem here reprinted was once exceedingly popular, and affords a good example of the subjects in which its author delighted—the terrors of the grave, grinning skulls, and drafts of blood—all forced upon the reader so persistently as to approach perilously near the verge of the ridiculous. This literary taste was the more singular in a man who in private life was a jovial companion, fond of good living, and by no means given to thinking about death and what comes after death. Lewis died of yellow fever contracted in Jamaica, where he had large estates. In the history of literature he is an interesting figure, since his writings form a connecting link between German and English romanticism.

By MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS.

A WARRIOR so bold, and a maiden so bright,  
 Conversed as they sat on the green;  
 They gazed on each other with tender delight:  
 Alonzo the Brave was the name of the knight,  
 The maiden's, the Fair Imogene.

"And oh," said the youth, "since to-morrow I go  
 To fight in a far-distant land,  
 Your tears for my absence soon ceasing to flow,  
 Some other will court you, and you will bestow  
 On a wealthier suitor your hand!"